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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 003679

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TAGS: PGOV PREL AF

SUBJECT: SUSPENDED ANIMATION: KABUL'S INAUGURATION AND  
CABINET WATCH

Classified By: Polcouns Annie Pforzheimer, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In the days before President Karzai's November 19 inauguration, the Kabul political buzz about the future cabinet is relatively subdued, in large part confined to the circulation of fake lists and rumors. In private, the Palace is asking for U.S. input but the real decisions will not be made until later this month, pushing the time limit of legislative confirmation since Parliament recesses December ¶6. Key political allies will get set numbers of ministries while negotiations continue with challenger Abdullah Abdullah and his erstwhile political allies. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The November 19 inauguration will be relatively small - according to Presidential Aide Shaida Abdali there will be top leadership from Parliament, four representatives from each of the 34 provinces, foreign dignitaries, media and others in a room seating at most 500 people. Palace insiders told us they fear disruption of some kind, including an alleged plot masterminded by Dr. Abdullah to throw shoes during the ceremony. Even so, we have been assured that Abdullah himself will be invited ... whenever anyone actually gets their formal invitation (four days from the ceremony, none have been delivered.)

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Waiting by the phone ...  
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¶3. (C) As of November 15, no reliable information has leaked about probable cabinet picks except the relatively solid standing of the Finance, Defense and Commerce ministers and the head of the national intelligence service (NDS), per a plethora of fake lists which make the rounds of embassies, journalists and other political junkies. On some lists, obviously horrifying choices abound, possibly to make the real lists look reasonable. It is very likely that such iron discipline over information flow is a reflection of the fact that no actual final choices have been made yet. According to two sources close to the Palace, Karzai has said he will not look at the names being compiled for him until the Saturday after the Inauguration.

¶4. (C) Some political players who have attacked Karzai in the past, such as former candidates Ashraf Ghani and Mirwais Yasini, and Abdullah supporter Burhanuddin Rabbani, now appear fairly forward-leaning in their dealings with Karzai's negotiators. Ghani is essentially waiting for some kind of offer but some in the Palace are reluctant to put him in the cabinet because he is so direct and acerbic. Yasini wants to be Attorney General but has no strong guarantee of a post. Chief of Staff Daudzai told D/Ambassador Ricciardone November 15 that Rabbani now realizes that "negotiating before the election results and after are different" and that "his price has come down." Rabbani had stipulated ten ministries and might get one or two, said Daudzai. According to Abdullah's aide, Omar Gafoorzai, Rabbani and Abdullah have parted ways so Rabbani has less clout since he does not really represent the Abdullah electorate.

15. (C) On the other hand, those who delivered votes for Karzai - especially the kind of votes that withheld examination for fraud - feel confident of their reward. Uzbek Junbesh Party leader Shakar Kargar told us November 15 that Dostum believes he will get four ministries and has given the President's Office of Administrative Affairs four names. (Note: Kargar himself is widely believed to be one of them, for the Ministry of Energy and Water, but he was not divulging that information. End note.) Kargar said that if the Palace disagrees with any of the names, the party would supply another, until they reached agreement. He said that Dostum understands the need to put forward candidates who eTCH constructive gubernatorial appointments for now. Given these appointments are made by decree and do not require Parliamentary approval, Karzai is less concerned about the timing of this process.

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constructive pressure now, the "warlords" around Karzai will impose their picks, and the Afghan people will assume the United States is comfortable with these appointments.

Sanjar offered to keep us apprised of any worrisome cabinet considerations if they become serious.

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Confirmation ... In February?  
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17. (C) Parliament, which must confirm cabinet appointments through a majority vote in the lower house, is due to recess on December 6. The Secretary General of the Wolesi Jirga, Ghulam Hassan Gran, told us November 14 that it would take about ten days to review and vote on cabinet nominees. It is possible the process would not be completed before the recess, he said, making the final votes in early February, after they return. Ministers will be in acting status until confirmation, which may limit their ability to carry out their duties (this is somewhat undefined under the constitution.) Parliament could be asked to postpone their recess, especially since the session started late due to election activities, but Gran asserted that this was impossible because "they work hard and need their rest."

18. (C) If an MP is chosen to be a minister he or she must give up their seat, which could affect the balance in the Parliament between Abdullah and Karzai supporters in favor of Abdullah. Karzai's people allegedly are taking this into consideration. Sanjar indicated that Karzai is not focusing much on gubernatorial appointments for now. Given these appointments are made by decree and do not require Parliamentary approval, Karzai is less concerned about the timing of this process.

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